

real economic binds the opportunity to access things that others regularly take for granted.

We could be going into America's greatest years. I believe we are. But we dare not squander this magic moment.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:23 a.m. in the International Ballroom Center at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Ruth Summerlin, principal, Beaufort Elementary School, Beaufort, SC. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

The President's News Conference With President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria

October 28, 1999

President Clinton. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Please be seated. President Obasanjo, Mrs. Obasanjo, members of the Nigerian Government, welcome to the White House.

The President has served his country in many ways, including a previous term as President, which was distinguished by his insistence on a peaceful transition to a successor chosen by the people. His recent election marks an even bigger turning point.

Since its birth in 1960, Nigeria's progress has been thwarted over and over again by military leaders with little concern for the 110 million people. For years, its most courageous citizens were jailed or killed; its vast wealth was lost to waste and corruption; its potential to lead its region and the continent toward a better future squandered.

In an early poem, "Flowers For My Land," Nigeria's Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, wrote that his beloved country had become a garden of decay. But President Obasanjo's election in May has signaled a new day for Nigeria and new hope for Africa, a fitting capstone to a decade of remarkable democratic revolutions from Poland to South Africa, to the important transition now underway in Indonesia.

It is very much in America's interests that Nigeria succeed, and therefore, we should assist them in their success. We intend to

increase our assistance to Nigeria to expand law enforcement cooperation and to work toward an agreement to stimulate trade and investment between us. We intend to do what we can to help Nigeria recover assets plundered by the previous regime.

But we must do more to realize the promise of this moment for Nigeria and for Africa. I want to mention just three issues.

First, we need to recognize that barriers to trade are barriers to opportunity for Africans working hard to catch up to the global economy and for Americans who want to work with them. That's why it is vital that the Senate approve the "African Growth and Opportunity Act," which is now pending and on which I spent much of the afternoon working.

A second concrete step we can take, as President Obasanjo has reminded us, is to help relieve the crushing debt burden that is making it so hard for developing nations to get on their feet. It is neither morally right nor economically sound to say that young democracies like Nigeria, as they overcome the painful legacy of dictatorship or misrule, must choose between making interest payments on their debt and investing in the health and education of their children. As Nigeria undertakes its reforms, I will support generous debt rescheduling through the Paris Club and encourage other countries to take further steps.

Finally, we must keep doing our part to bring an end to Africa's remaining conflicts. Many of you have heard about the unspeakable atrocities visited upon the people of Sierra Leone. Nigeria spent billions of dollars leading the international force that ended civil wars there and in Liberia. And for that, the whole world is in its debt.

Now in Sierra Leone as well as in Congo and hopefully soon in Eritrea and Ethiopia, we have a precious opportunity to work with Africans to make peace last. African countries are assuming the largest burden and the greatest risks. All they ask is that we support their efforts, through the United Nations and their own regional organizations. The United States must not let them down.

That is another reason why it is so vital that we honor our obligations and pay our debts to the United Nations. If we fail to

give others the tools to share the burdens of leadership in these situations, peace agreements we helped to forge may falter, and America would be left with an unacceptable choice in future conflicts, a choice between doing nothing or acting all alone.

I don't want to leave our children that bleak choice, and I intend to keep working with the Congress to get the resources to recognize our mutual responsibilities with others so that we can prevent it.

President Obasanjo once said, "I am uncrushed by the past and hopeful of the future. There can be no freedom in fear." Those succinct words define the essence of democracy and its faith in the capacity of free people to overcome life's obstacles, a universal faith valid no matter where expressed.

Nigeria is a pivot point on which the future of all Africa and much of the world will turn. I am very glad that that country is in the hands of this leader today.

Mr. President, the floor is yours.

President Obasanjo. Mr. President, it is just for me to take this opportunity on behalf of my government and the people of Nigeria to express a deep appreciation for your concern and for your support for the new dispensation in my country for democracy. We thank you for your commitment and the commitment of your country to ensure that democracy will continue to be nurtured and to be sustained in our country and in our part of the world.

We believe that democracy is a process and not an event. And therefore, we must continue to work to expand, to widen, and to deepen the process of democracy, which we are committed to do. We also thank you for the understanding you have shown for the commitment and the sacrifice which our country and our people have made and which we continue to make for peace and stability in our subregion and our region of Africa. We do this knowing and believing that peace is indivisible, and if there is no peace in any part of our subregion, it has implication for us.

We also thank you for the commitment you have made that, while we make our commitment, you will continue to support our commitment, because our own commitment, which will make peace and stability an endur-

ing feature of that part of the world, is a significant contribution to the world of peace, to the world of harmony, to the world of order and stability, which is so dear to all of us and which, of course, is of strategic importance and interest of the United States of America.

We thank you for the fact that you agree with us that in this day and age there should be no part of the world where any section of a society or a community should feel threatened for misgovernance, and we pledge, as we have done before, that whatever needs to be done to ensure humanitarian intervention to save life—dear life—we will join hands with you to ensure it.

Thank you for the reception and the hospitality we have enjoyed here. And we look forward for the opportunity to reciprocate on our land. Thank you.

President Clinton. Thank you.

We will now alternate questions between the American and the Nigerian press members here, and I will call on the American reporters and then the President will call on the Nigerians who have questions. And we'll start with Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press]. Go ahead.

Vice President Gore's 2000 Campaign

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. A domestic question. Mr. President, Vice President Gore last night felt compelled to say in New Hampshire, even though no one had asked anything about you, to say, "I understand the disappointment and anger that you feel toward President Clinton, and I felt it myself." Did the Vice President express that anger and disappointment to you at any time, and do you think that you have been a drag on the Vice President's campaign and a reminder of the Lewinsky impeachment issue?

President Clinton. No. You know, I think a lot of people who may not like me may hold it against him, but I don't think you hold him responsible. I don't think mature people hold one person responsible for another person's conduct. Do you?

I think if there had been some example of official misconduct in office which he had been a part of, that would be a different thing. But the American people are inherently fair. And insofar as they do blame him,

I hope they give him some of the credit for the longest peacetime expansion in history and the lowest unemployment rate in 29 years and the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years and the lowest poverty rates in 20 years and the lowest crime rates in 30 years and the first back-to-back budget surpluses in 42 years and a lot of credit for the smallest Federal Government in 37 years. So I would expect he should get some credit for that, and most Americans kind of like that.

If you ask Americans what kind of changes they want—I've told you before, if somebody polled me in one of these things and said, "Do you want more of the same, or do you want change," I would vote for change. You ask them what kind of changes they want. I bet you they will tell you they want to make better schools; they want more accessible health care; they want us to save Social Security and Medicare; they want America to continue to be safer; they want sensible gun restraint measures. And I think that's what the election will be about.

You know, people are not dumb. They vote for what is in their interest. And sometimes some of your fraternity get them—try to get them confused about what they should be voting on or what they should vote against, but in the end, they almost always get it right, and they vote for what's best for themselves and their children. Otherwise we wouldn't still be here after over 200 years. So that's what I think.

In terms of what he said, he hasn't said anything I hadn't said. He also said some other things that were, I noticed, omitted in the way you characterized the questions. But I was quite pleased with those other things he said. So I think the American people will make a decision based on what's in their interest.

I don't think—by the way, I don't think they ought to vote for him on the fact that we had a great record, either, except that the great record in evidence of what he can do and where he will lead. We get hired to work here. It's a privilege to serve. But if you do have a good record, it is certainly evidence of what you can do and what you will lead. And he has a great record and has been the most accomplished Vice President in history by a good, long ways.

You know, even my adversaries admit that I gave him a kind of partnership and a level of responsibility never before remotely equaled in the history of this country. And I think that is worth something in an election, because it shows what you can do.

But the public will make up their own mind based on what's best for them and their children and not be deterred by other people who would like the election to be about something other than what's best for them and their children.

President Obasanjo. Yes, the Nigerian side.

President Clinton. Otherwise, I don't have an opinion about that. [Laughter]

President Obasanjo. The Nigerian side, your question could be to me or to the President.

Q. I have two questions.

President Obasanjo. You are being greedy. [Laughter]

Q. Thank you.

The two questions: First of all, I want to thank President Clinton for going to Africa and for bringing African issues to the front burner of American policy initiatives. I want to tell you that the 2.5 million Africans in this country, they respect you, and they admire you. Thank you.

President Clinton. Thank you.

Return of Looted Assets/Slavery in Africa

Q. Then I have to ask my question. [Laughter] The first question is, Nigeria has spent a lot of money, President Clinton, in peacekeeping in Sierra Leone and in Liberia. As of yesterday, I believe that is about \$8 billion. And at the same time, Nigeria lost a lot of money through of lot of—I mean, our leaders looting the treasury and bringing the money not only to the U.S. but to Switzerland. What is the U.S. going to do about it, to recover that money, the money in this country and the money that is in Switzerland? That is the first question.

And then the next question is for the President of Nigeria, President Obasanjo. As we enter the 21st century, the next millennium, Africans in the Sudan—black Africans are being held slaves. The OAU has not done anything about it. And we would like to know, as the President of the largest African

country in Africa, what the Government of Nigeria is going to do to ensure that there is no African who is a slave as we enter the 21st century.

Thank you.

President Clinton. Well, first I'll answer the question you asked me. I think it's important that we do whatever we can to help Nigeria recover money that was looted from the country and that belongs to the people of Nigeria. The Attorney General came to our meeting today, Attorney General Reno, and we are working with the Government of Nigeria, and I will do whatever we can legally do to help recover funds that are in this country and whatever we can do to assist in recovering funds that may be in Switzerland or elsewhere.

You know, we have—we may have to get some help, some voluntary help from the Swiss. You know, the laws are different in different countries, but we think there are quite a number of things we can do here, and we're committed to working with the Nigerian Government to do that.

President Obasanjo. Thank you very much. The only thing I can add to that is that the Swiss authorities have already frozen some accounts in Switzerland, and other steps that have to be taken will be taken as a result of what they have done so far.

The issue of Sudan—I don't think you would be absolutely right to say that the OAU has done nothing about it. Maybe what the OAU has done about it has not achieved the desired result. But let me say this: Over the last 20 years that I was—well, less 3 years and a few months—that I was away in special custody—[*laughter*—I have been seized with the Sudan problem.

Personally, I know it very well. I've dealt with all the leaders in the Sudan since I left public office in 1979 until now. And I also know that there are other African leaders who are concerned about the problem, particularly the IGAD leaders—that is the organization in the Horn of Africa. And even right now, they are prescribing solutions; they are suggesting and making recommendations to the two sides.

And our own position, Nigeria's position is that we should not have too many cooks; that will spoil the soup. We shall do every-

thing together. And since IGAD is doing a good job, we should work through them; we should support them. And that is what we are doing. And we believe that that way there will be no diversion; there will be no distraction; and eventually we will get the right solution to the problem of Sudan.

But I agree with you. Anywhere in Africa or, indeed, anywhere in the world, there should be no situation of slavery or slave trade at this time, at this stage, at this point in the last year of the dying years of the 20th century, on the eve of the 21st century.

President Clinton. Lori [Lori Santos, United Press International].

Middle East Peace Process

Q. In Oslo, sir, what are you expecting from your meetings with Chairman Arafat and Prime Minister Barak? And what are the next steps, and are you looking for any concrete results?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, I think it's a good thing that we're going to have this trilateral meeting, and it's just another step along the way. They've been making good progress, and they're working hard.

I wouldn't want to raise expectations excessively about what the results of this meeting will be, but they have put themselves on an aggressive timetable, and they have a lot of tough issues to work through. And since the United States has, at least in my time, primarily played a role as a facilitator, with greater or lesser degrees of intensity and initiative—including the Wye talks, where no one slept for 9 days—I think that it's best for me not to speculate about what the substantive results will be.

Let me say this: I believe that both these leaders want to make peace. I believe they're committed to it. And I believe they know they're down to the difficult issues now. But I also believe they're imagining what a final agreement would look like, what they could live with, and what would be good for the other side, and mostly, what would preserve the integrity of their principles and the long-term peace of the region.

So I'm looking forward to the meeting. I'm looking forward to honoring the memory of Yitzhak Rabin. I think he would be very

proud of what Prime Minister Barak and Mr. Arafat are doing now.

President Obasanjo. The Nigerian side?

President Clinton's Commitments to Nigeria

Q. Mr. President, in your statement here you were full of thanks to President Clinton for the support he has expressed to you, probably, during discussions today. Would you give us some of the specific commitment that he made to you during your discussions?

President Obasanjo. Well, the same specific commitment he made to me during our discussion, he has made here. He will support efforts to have resources taken away illegally from Nigeria, to recover them. He will support our efforts to lift the burden of debt, so that we can have a breather to be able to consolidate our democracy. He will support our efforts to be able to be strong enough internally, as a country, and within our subregion and our region, so that we can contribute to peace and stability in our region and in our subregion. He will support efforts to deal with crime, to fight against crime and narcotic traffic in our country.

Those are some of them, and I think for those commitments he deserves to be thanked. I don't know what you think.

President Clinton. Can I just say, also—I don't believe you said this exactly, Mr. President. I did make it clear that we have requested from the Congress funds sufficient to increase our bilateral aid to Nigeria, somewhere between 3 and 4 times what it was before. And that's part of—and I vetoed the first bill that the Congress passed, and we're fighting now to try to get more funds in the aggregate for our foreign assistance programs. And this is one of the reasons that I want the money. And I believe that—I may be wrong, but I believe that both Republicans and Democrats in the United States Congress understand that Nigeria's future is very important to our own.

Arshad [Arshad Mohammed, Reuters].

Situation in Chechnya

Q. Mr. President, Russia appears to have intensified its offensive against Chechnya this week with heavy bombardment and with ground troops approaching the capital,

Grozny, from three directions. Do you think that this offensive may ultimately backfire on Russia and lead to greater bitterness among the Chechens toward Moscow and, ultimately, sow deeper seeds of conflict both in the region and also possibly that may bring itself back to Russian soil?

President Clinton. I think it depends upon whether, ultimately, there is a political solution or not or whether the Russian Government attempts to find a military solution. I have never believed that, ultimately, there could be a solution to any of these problems that was not a political one, that recognized the extraordinary, complex tapestry of ethnic and religious groups across the belly of Russia and just to the south.

As you know, it's an explosive part of the world—not just in Chechnya, but we've had difficulties in Dagestan; the Georgians have had their challenges; we had the terrible, terrible shooting in Armenia yesterday and the loss of the Prime Minister and seven others.

So, you know, it has been our experience—that's all I can tell you—it's been our experience that in every place where there are genuine ethnic and religious difficulties and particularly when they're combined, that sooner or later people have to stop fighting and start talking and that any military strategy ought to be designed to do nothing more than to create the conditions within which a negotiated settlement can be reached, because in the end I think that's what will have to happen.

And what the United States hopes, since we also have a big stake in the success of democracy and freedom and prosperity in Russia, is that we will see a minimization of the casualties and that we will hasten the day when there will be a negotiated solution that all the parties can live with.

Inducement To Invest in Nigeria

Q. Mr. President, you have the largest democracy in Africa. What are the initiatives you have to make it sustainable over some time? Also as far as debt consolidation is concerned, what are some of the measures your Government is doing to attract businesses and investors to invest in Nigeria?

President Obasanjo. Well, to invite investment into Nigeria, we have to create conducive environment for business to thrive. We have to create conducive environment for investors to want to invest in Nigeria because investors have choices. Therefore, we should make them choose to come to Nigeria.

And what are we doing? First of all, we are eliminating corruption as a way of life in Nigeria. Few—not many if at all any honest businessmen will want to rush into a corrupt atmosphere to do business. So we have to remove corruption, and we are doing that. We have to provide a level playing ground for all participants, so that there is equity, there is fairness, there is justice, and you can go in and compete. That we have done. The rules and regulations must be clear, so that you know what it is. There must be transparency. There must be openness. That, too, we have done, particularly in competition, so that when you do lose out, you are at least satisfied that the one who gets it is a better hand or has presented a better case or a better offer.

Again, we have to provide an environment that is reasonably—reasonably—devoid of crime. We are fighting against crime—crime—in such a way that lives and properties can be safe and secure, in such a way that investment can be secure. These and all the things we are doing—the rule of law, so that when you have to seek arbitration by the court, you can be sure that you get a fair deal from the court—we are doing all that we need to do to make the investors feel that all of the things put together, Nigeria is a better place to invest than any other place of comparative economic situation.

President Clinton. If I could just say, if I were in the audience, I would be applauding what the President said because, you know, I've spent a great deal of my time for 7 years trying to create economic opportunities for the American people and even trying to create special incentives for people to go to some of the poorest areas in our country, in our empowerment zone program that the Vice President has run for 6 years now. And everything he said is right. Nigeria is a great country. You have a large population, vast

resources, good location, all that oil. You have to be well-governed and competitive.

What he said was absolutely right. I can just tell you as an outsider, Nigeria will be a very appealing place to people all over the world if they are convinced it is well-governed and serious about development. And in the end, the President—he's also a good salesman. He's out here working some of those opportunities while he's here in America, and I've been impressed.

John [John Palmer, NBC News], go ahead.

Enforcement of Gun Laws

Q. Mr. President, I have a domestic question. I don't know how much of an opportunity you have these days to listen to the radio. But the National Rifle Association is conducting quite a campaign, saying that we really don't need any new gun laws, if your administration would just enforce those that are on the books. How has your administration done in enforcing these laws, and how do you answer that rather serious charge?

President Clinton. Let me just say what they do. What they do is, they say, our prosecution for gun law violations, our volume is down. What they don't do is to look at the total prosecutions for gun law violations, the volume of which is up. The number of total gun law violations is up.

Now, what we have done, ever since Attorney General Reno came to the Justice Department, as a local prosecutor in a big urban prosecutorial district in Miami, we have worked to properly allocate the resources of the Justice Department and local prosecutors. And we have worked with all of our U.S.—excuse me, U.S. Attorneys, to do the same thing. So it's just not accurate to say, if you look at total prosecutions of existing laws, that they're down. That's the first thing I want to say.

Second thing I want to say is, the average sentence in America, I believe, is longer than it is in any other country in the world, except one, maybe. And the percentage of people we have behind bars is higher, I believe, than any other country in the world. There are two possible exceptions. We might be as low as third, but I think we're first.

Now, the last thing I want to say about that is, they made this argument before. This

is the argument they made against the Brady bill. Remember, they said two things: All you've got to do is really prosecute the existing laws; and the Brady bill won't do any good because criminals don't buy their guns at gun stores. Those were the two arguments they made.

Well, 5 years later we've got 400,000 people who haven't been able to buy guns because of the Brady bill, and we've got the lowest crime rate in 30 years. And you know, we've been all for enforcement. I'm trying to get more prosecutors right now. We've put 100,000 police on the street, I would remind you. I'm not against enforcement. But that is not an excuse for America to keep being the only major country in the world that still has gaping loopholes in its protections to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and children.

And let me just say one thing. I know I've said this till a lot of you are sick of me saying this, but I'm going to say it until I leave here and after I'm gone. If their arguments were right we would not have the kind of accidental death rate by guns that we do. The accidental death rate by gunshots of children in the United States is 9 times higher than the rate of the next 25 largest industrial economies put together.

We have not done enough to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and children. We can do more without interfering with the right to hunt and the right to sport shoot. And they're just wrong. It sounds clever. You know, it's interesting, the NRA, they're normally with the conservatives; they like it when you have States' rights, you know. So here we worked out a deal, and the local prosecutors do more cases which ought to be in the local courts, and we take the hard cases and put them in the Federal courts that take more time, more cost, or multi-State cases, and they conveniently take the Federal number and overlook the rest.

And I might say, I think in times past, maybe administrations that did not want to enforce—did not want to pass the Brady bill, did not want to have the assault weapons ban, did not want to close the loopholes in the background checks, might have gone out and filed a lot of cases to say, "Well, this is what we're doing." The evidence is in. We have

the lowest crime rate in 30 years. And the assault weapons ban and the Brady bill played a big role in it.

So the NRA is fighting a rearguard action that's just wrong. They were wrong on the Brady bill, and they're wrong today. You don't have to take my word for it. Look at the evidence and ask yourself why, if you can enforce your way out of this, every other country in the world with an advanced economy still has a lower murder rate and a drastically lower rate of accidental killings by guns? You know, they never talk about that, because they can't.

Debt Relief for Nigeria

Q. My question is for either of the two Presidents. Specifically, with all emphasis on that word, the debt relief that has been proposed for Nigeria, is it consolation, partial or total, or rescheduling?

President Obasanjo. Well, let me put it this way: The best thing that I would want to have is not to have debt at all. But when you look at it, since 1985 or thereabout, when the total debt we had was about \$6 billion, we really haven't added much debt to it. And our debt stands at about \$28–\$30 billion today. And all that is essentially interest rescheduling and all that.

So when you talk about rescheduling, I'm apprehensive. When you talk of remission, even staying of interest for some time will be one way. But we cannot—we cannot—talk of being able to do what we need to do to nurture, to sustain democracy, and to give our people democracy dividend, bearing the burden of debt that is hanging over us at this point in time.

President Clinton. Let me answer the question, and I will try to be—I'll be very candid with you. First of all, you must understand this is not a question for the United States only to resolve. I have a much more aggressive attitude, generally, on debt relief than many of my counterparts do in other parts of the world, although not all of them. There are others who agree with me. And I have a more aggressive attitude than some people in our Congress do, although I hope I can persuade them before we go home this year.

Under the present framework, Nigeria is not eligible for total cancellation of debt because of its assets, its petroleum assets. As the President pointed out to me today, if you had a different measure, if you measured the real per capita income of individual Nigerians or some of the other social indicators like infant mortality, it would present, I think, a more accurate picture of what life in Nigeria is like today.

Here is my view. Right now, we ought to get whatever relief we can, because you need to—even the rescheduling relief is worth something. It takes a burden off your back now and gives you a chance to get some breathing room and doesn't raise the questions of creditworthiness, so that we can get more investment into Nigeria and more loans into Nigeria as well, if they're necessary.

Then I think, frankly, that the more the President succeeds in the program that he's outlined, the more we will be able to work with the rest of the world to deal with the long-term interests of Nigeria and the long-term health of Nigeria. But the reason I said rescheduling today is I have concluded that that's really worth something to you, and that's all we can do right now, because of the standard by which the highly indebted poor countries are measured.

But if you look at what's happened to Nigeria's oil resources and what's happened in the previous years and what people are really living on, you could make a compelling case for more relief. And I think what we should do is take what we can get now and pocket it and try to get some more investment into your country and keep working to support the reforms that the President has outlined and just keep working to get more relief as we go along. That's what I think is the only realistic hope. And I am certainly open to that. And I think the more other world leaders get to see this President, get to see what's going on, the more likely we'll be to succeed.

We'll take one more each. Yes, go ahead. I didn't know who I pointed at—[laughter]—all three of you should stand up and shout. Give me a selection. I'll decide which one I want to answer. [Laughter]

Q. We could do it in unison.

President Clinton. All right, go ahead.

Federal Budget

Q. Mr. President, it's late in the congressional budget process, and I'm wondering, is there any prospect at this point of a Government shutdown, and are there any of your priorities on which you will insist on be non-negotiable in the talks that are occurring right now?

President Clinton. I do not believe there will be a Government shutdown. I would be very surprised if there is one. But neither do I think we should just have continuing resolutions for the next year and a half. Somehow we have to come to terms with this.

Just today—I don't know if you saw it—the Congressional Budget Office said that the budget passed by the Republican majority is, even with the one percent across-the-board budget cut which you've already heard the Secretary of Defense and others say would have a very bad impacts, is still \$17 billion short and would require more than 4 percent more to be cut across the board, just as I told them all along.

So we're going to have to work together to get a budget that works. And all this sort of smoke and mirrors that they have been doing and claiming that we and the Democrats were trying to spend the Social Security surplus, when they were spending it all along, is not helpful.

Most Americans, as a matter of fact—and this is a service all of you could do for the country, actually. I just spoke to a bunch of educators today, and they all came up afterward and thanked me for explaining what was really going on, because most Americans can't figure out why, if we keep announcing bigger and bigger surpluses, why we're having a budget fight, and why we're having across-the-board cuts.

And of course, it's because both parties made a commitment at the beginning of this session that from this day forward we wouldn't spend the Social Security surplus, which could have been done without tough choices had it not been for the magnitude of the natural disasters and the farm crisis and the size of the defense increases that the Congress wanted, even over and above the substantial defense increases that I recommended.

So that's why we've got this problem. We can solve this problem. I am committed to doing it. But I think it would be a great mistake for us to walk away from here and abandon the commitment we made just last year to 100,000 teachers. We ought to get the 50,000 police started, just like we started the 100,000 police before, because it gave us the lowest crime rate in 30 years, and now we can look forward to being the safest big country in the world. And we need to adequately fund our environmental budget and get those riders out of there, those antienvironmental riders out of there.

I never thought I'd get 100 percent of what I wanted. I think they're making a big mistake not beginning the prescription drug benefit on Medicare and not adding any days to the life of the Medicare or the Social Security Trust Fund. But because I vetoed the tax cut, we can come back to all that early next year. But we shouldn't walk away from here having dismantled our commitment to 100,000 teachers, not dealing with the 50,000 police, not dealing with the environmental issues. And I'm prepared to work with them.

I don't want a partisan fight on this. This is crazy for us to be having a big partisan blowout because they both made a commitment not to spend the Social Security surplus, and then it turned out to be harder than necessary, and all of it is being mixed into a sort of a combustible political mix. We need to sit down like grownups, go out and tell the American people the truth, and work through this. We can find the offsets. We don't have to spend the Social Security surplus. We can do this. And I hope they will work with me to do it.

Demographics in Nigeria

Q. According to a recent United Nations world population prospect report, 45 percent of Nigeria's 1.29 million population is under age 15, and an additional 18 is in the 15 to 24 years category. What this means is that we have about 63 percent of Nigeria's population which is under the age of 24. President Obasanjo, what does this mean to today's Nigeria and the country's future?

President Obasanjo. Well, to today's Nigeria it means that, simple—37 percent, if you take all the remainder as working, which

is not the case—that 37 percent of Nigerians are working to keep 100 percent of Nigerians alive, because you know it, from age one to about age 24, you are preparing yourself for life. It's either you are in school, or you are learning a trade, or you are in the university or something of that nature. Now, that puts strain on Nigerians that are working if they are working. But are they really working? That's another question.

Then, for future, if we are able to train them, ah, the future is bright. There you will have that large population, if everything else is all right, that will be vibrant, educated, talented, and going places for Nigeria, well-governed, the economy buoyant. You can't ask for anything better. So if we train, we look after them and we prepare them adequately, good for future. But for now, it's a strain, and we have to bear out this strain.

President Clinton. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's 183d news conference began at 4:25 p.m. in Presidential Hall (formerly Room 450) in the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Stella Obasanjo, wife of President Obasanjo; 1986 Nobel Prize for Literature recipient Wole Soyinka; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel; and murdered Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan of Armenia. President Obasanjo referred to OAU, the Organisation of African Unity, and IGAD, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

Statement on the Crash of Navy Blue Angels

October 28, 1999

I am deeply saddened that today America lost two of its bravest and most distinguished Naval aviators in a tragic crash of a Navy jet belonging to the Blue Angels.

As a nation we all owe our military service-members a tremendous debt of gratitude.

At this time of great loss—a loss that we all share—my heartfelt prayers go to their families, their shipmates, and to the entire Navy.